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A PILGRIM
FROM IRELAND

REV. M. CARNOT O.S.B.



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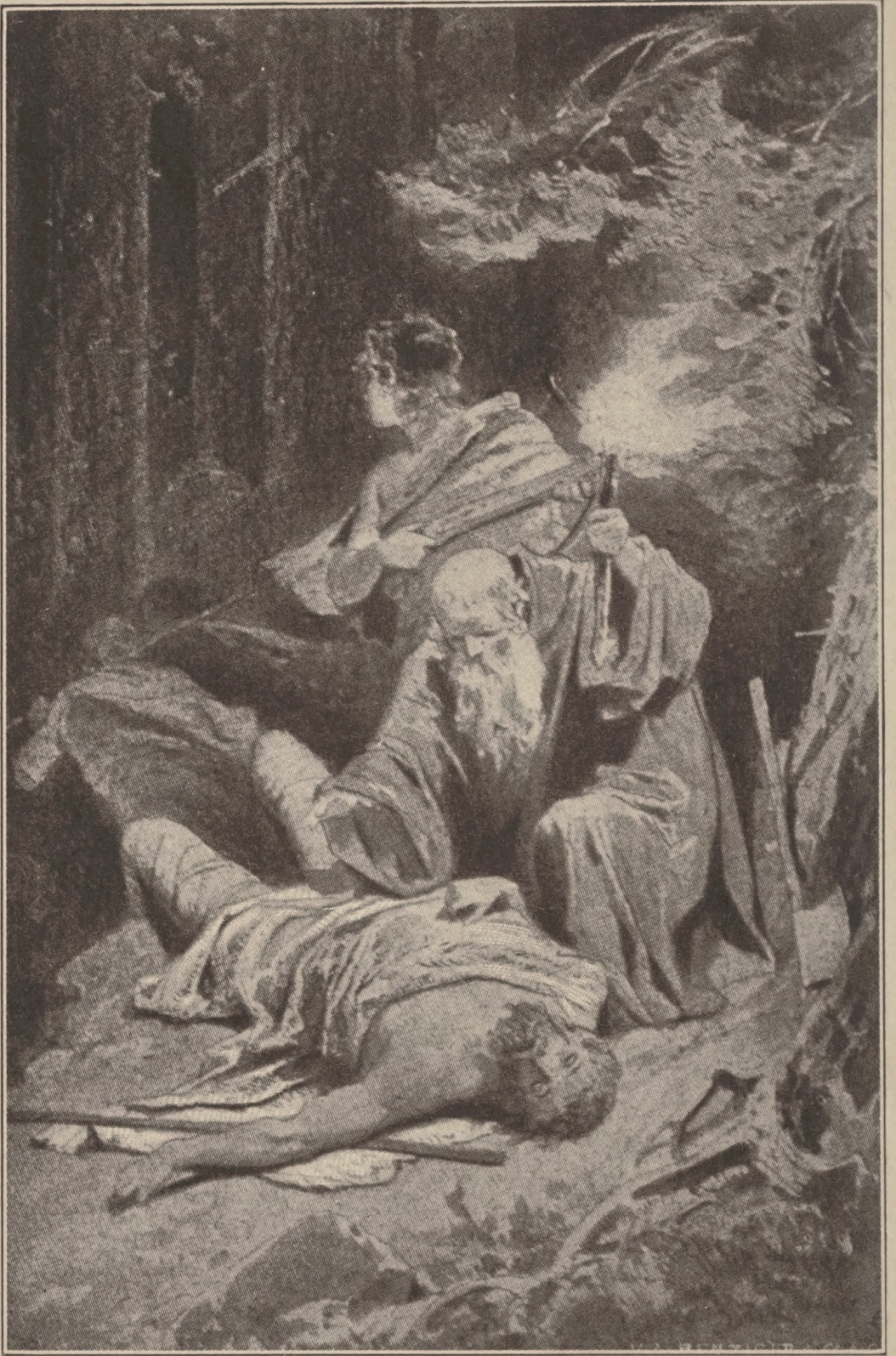
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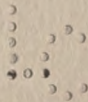


"The robbers fled and disappeared in the forest."—Page 88.

A PILGRIM FROM IRELAND

BY
REV. MAURUS CARNOT, O.S.B.

TRANSLATED BY
MARY E. MANNIX

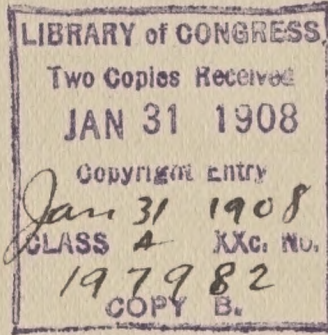


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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Not far from my cloister there is a little hillock, upon which stands a lonely tree, and under the shade of this tree there is a solitary bench. I love to sit there, because it gives mine eyes much to feast upon; the pretty village with its houses of timber and stone, the green woods, and beyond them the fields where the cattle roam in summer time, the meadow where glistening scythes swing to and fro, and the yellow corn is waving. And there three roads meet, and there comes to mine ears the sound of trampling hoofs and rumbling wheels.

The cloister overlooks the landscape, and above each tower the cross gleams in the golden sunshine.

Indeed, the eye could never tire of the

beautiful scene stretching farther and farther in the distance. And in the lonely tree a little bird is singing as though it would ask: "What is it that charms thee so?"

And I answered the tiny songster:—
"Knowest thou, birdling, I am thinking of the past; I am thinking of the good man who came from green and holy Erin, far away, to beautify and make prosperous this land. And I have bethought me that I will tell the tale. It is a charming story, and I will write it for the children and for their elders to whom they are dear, as they were to the heart of Sigisbert, the Pilgrim from Ireland."

MAURUS CARNOT.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The charm of this little tale lies principally in its quaint and beautiful simplicity, as well as the reality with which the writer invests its every incident. The snow-capped mountains, the grassy valleys, the streams with their mossy banks—we see them all; the venerable Sigisbert, the sturdy Rätus, the gentle Columbin, the man who fell among robbers—we seem to know them, every one. We share their labors and their repose, we sit beside them at the hospitable fireside, we rest with them in the dense and silent forest, the compassionate moon and faithful stars watching our tired sleep.

To the translator, her work has been a labor of love. To the fortunate reader, whether child or adult, the fascinating tale must be both profitable and delightful.

A PILGRIM FROM IRELAND

CHAPTER I

SIGISBERT COMES TO THE LAND OF RHÆTIA

DEAR Children: What I am about to relate to you took place neither yesterday nor the day before yesterday, but more than a thousand years ago. And where is that land in which these things happened that I am going to tell you? Have you never heard of the Rhine? The Rhine is a river which runs through a very great extent of country. If you should be desirous of knowing the source of this river, you will have to journey to the mountains. On the top of a very high mountain there is a little lake; from

this lake the Rhine begins to flow downward till it reaches a valley below. But it is as yet only a tiny brook. This mountain and valley were formerly called Rhoetia. The little green lake was at that time in the middle of a wood; trees that remained green all winter grew on both sides of the valley. All around and above them were ice and snow, which never melted during the warmest season.

It was a lovely evening in summer. In the blue sky the gentle, silvery moon was shining. All about her the stars were gleaming, serene and clear in the broad blue heavens. But in the thick forest of fir-trees that sloped downward to the valley it was not so bright, for the high mountain cast a deep shadow in the moonlight. All around it was very still and peaceful. The birds had gone to sleep, but the screech owl was awake in an ancient fir-tree, and his cry rang through the peaceful night.

Suddenly, the figure of a man appeared in

the gloomy wood. He carried an iron-tipped staff in his hand, by the help of which he traversed the stony pathway. Who could have come so late into the valley? It was a wanderer. Poor man, may God protect him!

The traveler stepped lightly and quickly forward, letting no grass grow under his feet as he passed. He continued his way through the wood, and soon left it behind till he came upon a wide heath where few flowers grew, but a multitude of stars looked down, and the tall shadow of the pilgrim went ever beside him. Farther and farther he journeyed, and soon the forest closed about him. He dared ~~not~~ rest. Why not? Because the people on the other side of the mountain had driven him away with cruel threats of torture and death, though he had never done anything but good in their behalf. Now and then he glanced quickly behind him to see if he were followed. But he saw no one.

After a while he came to a small mountain lake; it shone like gold in the moonlight, streaming down from the dark blue heavens. The banks were lined with great stones as high as a man, with here and there a fir-tree; and between the trees and stones were quantities of briars and brambles. The traveler paused, leaning against a rock in order to breathe and rest a little. Presently he sat down, with his head against the stone, and slept; and his slumber was as quiet as the sleep of death. All at once he was awakened by a noise in the bushes. Frightened he sprang to his feet. But his alarm soon vanished; through the brambles he perceived a roe drinking from the shimmering water. The moon still rode high in the heavens, but its light was not so bright as when he had lain down. The good man longed for the night to be over, as he journeyed farther and farther from the lake until he came to the top of the mountain. And then he stood still and gazed at the

dark forest and the peaceful valley beneath him; he was looking for the first time upon the beautiful land of Rhætia.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST MORNING IN THE LAND OF RHÆTIA

WHO was the lonely wanderer? His name was Sigisbert. Peace sat enthroned upon his brow, and his eyes shone with sweetness and loving kindness. It was the dawn of the morning; soon above the distant mountain peaks the heavens burst forth into flaming splendor. Long did Sigisbert gaze upon it; he seemed like an image carven out of stone, standing there in the blush of the morning.

Sigisbert the wanderer was tall and handsome. His long black robe flowed about him almost to the ground. He wore neither hat nor cap as a protection for his head. His hair was gray; upon the temples almost

white. A thick gray beard extended half-way down his bosom. A leathern girdle fastened his full robe about the waist; on the right side hung a chain from which a knife depended. His right hand clasped an oaken staff ending in an iron point, fastened to a small transverse piece of wood, so that the staff was in reality a cross. Oh, if that staff could have spoken, how many tales could it not have told of land and sea, of cities and villages, of forest and field! The road from the oak wood in distant Ireland where the staff first grew to the mountain in Rhætia was so long, so long! And how much would it not have had to tell of good and evil days, of joyful hours and sorrowful!

The traveler wore a pair of thick leathern sandals, fastened with straps. But, as he stood there in the glorious morning light, the soles of his feet were bleeding; showing how long and toilsome was the way he had come. And now the sun appeared from be-

hind the mountain-tops, like a broad expanse of shining gold. It gleamed so brilliantly upon the snow-covered peaks that the eyes of the good traveler could not bear the reflection. He looked down into the valley beneath him, enveloped in a mantle of misty blue.

And all around it were green trees laden with dewdrops glistening like the rainbow; and the birds flew out of their nests, singing gaily and sweetly, as though in thankfulness to the good God for the sun and the dew. They came nearer and nearer to Sigisbert, and it seemed to him that they were warbling in his ears these very words: "Lonely wanderer, we greet thee, and bid thee welcome."

The sun mounted higher and higher in the sky, filling the whole valley with its radiance. Sigisbert raised his eyes joyfully to heaven; but soon dropped them earthward and again continued his journey. Presently he espied a stream springing from

beneath a rock. He approached it, dipped his hand in the cold, murmuring water, bathed his forehead and eyes, and washed his bleeding feet. Then kneeling on the mossy ground beside it, he steadied his staff on his shoulder, clasped about it hands that trembled with fatigue and joy, and poured forth his soul in this tuneful prayer.

“Once more doth shine the morning,
To God the giver grateful be;
That through the long and dreary night
From danger he has kept us free.
So that when day once more shall fade
And night again doth round us creep,
Sinless and calm and unafraid,
Upon his bosom we may sleep.”

And while for a space Sigisbert prayed to the Almighty, the larks fluttered and sang round about him in the radiant air. Thus passed for the good pilgrim Sigisbert his first morning in the beautiful land of Rhætia.

CHAPTER III

HOW SIGISBERT TRAVELED FARTHER

WHEN Sigisbert had finished his prayer, he stood up and again took his pilgrim-staff in his hand. Then he turned his eyes in the direction whence he had come. Did he fear something, or suspect that he had been followed? O, no! There was no fear in his eyes; they were soft and shining. It was as though they fain would seek a country beyond the mountains, far, far away over many lands and many seas. But ah! he could not see it, that dear Fatherland. Then he stretched forth his hand and said in a low, trembling voice, tears filling his eyes, "Farewell, dear, dear home! I shall see thee nevermore. I send thee greeting over land and over sea. Take the

love and longing of thy son, the only one thou hast here in Rhoetia. Green Island, distant, beloved home, farewell; and God be with thee!" Then he slowly turned about once more and wiped the tears from his mild blue eyes.

Smiling, he passed onward in the fresh morning, though tears still shone in his eyes and his brow was clouded with the sadness of the thoughts that oppressed him. The forest became more and more dense. What trees! Here and there he came across a trunk so thick that two men could scarcely have encircled it with their arms. The broad overhanging branches formed a green arbor above him as he walked. Only at intervals could the sunlight penetrate to the emerald floor beneath. Now and then he would come upon an Alpine rose as red as wine, and all through the thick grass, white, blue and yellow flowers were blooming. But there was no road, no path through the forest. Sigisbert murmured to himself:

“Pleasanter was it to journey through the oakwoods outside my native village. Here I am alone, all alone, save for the wild beasts that in this place have their lairs and their accustomed ways. Still I fear neither bear nor wolf; the strong hand of God will protect me from danger.”

Fearlessly he continued his descent into the valley. To his right he now heard the noise of a flowing stream; it was the infant Rhine, its white foam rushing between the green bushes and red Alpine roses with which its banks were lined.

Suddenly Sigisbert paused. He had seen a roe, in color a dark, rusty yellow. It was trembling all over, as it drank a little from the stream, looking back fearfully with its beautiful eyes. Then with one spring it leaped across the water and disappeared in the forest. Sigisbert glanced after it; he heard the crackling of dry branches on the ground. A bear, an immense, shaggy bear! Sigisbert gave a little fearful cry, and hid

himself behind a fir-tree. The bear sniffed right and left, trotted towards the brook, stood on his hind feet and jumped over the stream. As he landed on the other side, Sigisbert, still trembling, heard the thud of his great paws upon the ground. Then once more it was still, as the bear ploughed onward through the forest. But Sigisbert murmured: "Hurry, hurry poor roe, or soon you will bleed under the paws of the cruel bear!"

Farther and farther fared the wanderer downward to the valley; now close to the Rhine, now stepping upon the hillside. The sun stood high in the heavens. Sigisbert sought and found some wild strawberries, laying a handful on a broad, green leaf. His search for the fruit had brought him close to the bank of the little river, and he sat down beside it. He took from his pocket a small piece of dry bread. Then he said the "Our Father" and settled himself upon the mossy ground to eat his simple meal. And as he sat there, he said half aloud:

"The table of my dear parents was three times as well furnished with meat and flour, and in my cloister also I had better food; still I will be content. The dear God has been good to me, and I will work for Him." And after he had eaten he said: "God bless the welcome meal."

After an hour's rest, well fortified by the bread, water and strawberries of which he had partaken, Sigisbert again resumed his journey. At the foot of the mountain he stood still, facing a strip of open moorland. Naught grew there but an old weather-beaten fir, not far from which sparkled a tiny spring. Sigisbert saw nowhere any traces of wild beasts, and with a feeling of relief, he said aloud: "Here dwell no wild beasts, here will I take shelter for the night."

The sun was already far down in the west, the mountain-tops glistened like fiery coals; as the orb of day sunk behind them, Sigisbert knelt once more and said his

nightly prayer. When he dwelt in the monastery with his brethren, they all prayed together in the chapel, but now Sigisbert was obliged to pray alone.

“O holy Light, O three in one,
God of our souls, the day is done!
Though vanished now the sunshine be,
We find our Light, our Day in Thee!
We praise Thee in our morning song,
The psalms of night to Thee belong.
O may we ever faithful be,
And praise Thee through Eternity!”

And then he said “Our Father” for the country he had now chosen as his second home. By this time night had fallen. High over the mountain forest shone the moon; thousands and thousands of stars illumined the heavens. Sigisbert lay down to rest, the grassy floor his bed, a moss covered stone his pillow, the lovely blue starry heavens the roof of his broad resting place.

CHAPTER IV

HOW SIGISBERT MADE SOME ACQUAINTANCES

THE night was past, and again the birds were singing in the fir-trees. Sigisbert arose, went to the spring, washed his face and drank some cool fresh water. He felt many years younger than on the preceding evening. He was so contented this morning; he had found a home where he might remain. He said his morning prayer and then his thin but firm, strong hand grasped his staff once more. He wished to find neither gold nor silver, neither honor nor glory; he sought only men. And he would strive to make them as happy as he was in his own heart.

What was that in the bushes? Could it be another bear? Sigisbert held his hand over

his eyes and peered into the forest. There he saw two boys under a tree. They must also have seen him at the same moment, for they seemed astonished. The larger one held a great withered bough in his hand. He was ready to protect himself if perchance the old man might seek to injure them. They both shrank slowly behind the broad trunk of the tree. Sigisbert advanced towards them, and smilingly beckoned to them. But the boys did not move. He came nearer, and not a little alarmed, they took each other by the hand. But the kind-looking stranger seemed only friendly, and he placed his hand on the head of the elder boy. And thus vanished their fears, for they saw that the man in the black robe meant them no harm.

The larger of the two boys was a strong, hearty fellow, with muscular arms, and looked with his great black eyes squarely into those of the stranger. He was apparently about fifteen years old. The other was

26 *How Sigisbert Made Acquaintances*

smaller and thinner; he had probably seen some twelve summers. His blue eyes were shyly lifted to the face of the tall, unknown man before him. The clothing of both was very scanty. They had no head-covering of any kind; they wore neither shoes nor sandals. The younger of the two had a fresh cut on his forehead. No one had washed or bound up the gaping wound.

Sigisbert began to question them. He spoke Latin, of which the boys seemed to understand a little, for the language of Rhoetia bore some resemblance to the Latin tongue. From time to time the boys would shake their heads and smile at each other, but occasionally they would be able to answer the questions of the friendly stranger.*

Sigisbert was filled with joy at this meeting. Taking the little one by the hand, he

*The children spoke a sort of corrupt Latin, which was the language of the country, and had really a better command of the language, perhaps, than had Sigisbert, who had doubtless learned Latin only after he had left his native land. Thus they were very soon able to understand each other.

said, "Come, we will look for water," and they went towards the Rhine, which flowed near by. Sigisbert took from the pocket of his black robe a white linen cloth, dipped it in the cool water, and cleansed the wound upon the forehead of the little boy. It was high time; the wound was full of poison. Then he washed the bloody face and small thin hands of the boy and afterwards rinsing out the linen in the clear running water bound it about the wounded forehead. Oh, how grateful those boys were to the good old man! The elder boy also washed his hands and face, and dried them in the sun. Oh, how fresh and sweet they seemed now, in the pretty green wood! The larger boy leaped along over stones almost as high as himself. After a while Sigisbert gave them each a small piece of bread. Never had anything tasted half so good!

Said Sigisbert at last: "Are you not afraid here in the forest, alone?"

"We are afraid of bears and wolves,"

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replied the elder. "We hardly dare breathe as we go through the wood. Only a few days ago a wicked bear tore our companion to pieces. We found the corpse; it was all bloody and one arm was gone."

Sigisbert's heart grew sad at this tale, and as the younger boy walked beside him he drew nearer and great tears rolled from his blue eyes. The other continued to talk, and Sigisbert listened, now and then asking him a question. He learned that farther along in the valley people were living, as well as here and there on the hillsides. The sun was now directly over the heads of Sigisbert and his young companions, whom the good old man would fain have kept beside him. But he looked up at the blue sky, and then making the sign of the cross on the forehead of the elder boy he said, "Thou art my good Rätus," making the same holy sign upon the brow of the younger, he said, "And thou art my dear Columbin. Thou must wash thy wound again this evening. And

now go home! When the sun rises in the heavens to-morrow, come to me once more!"

The little Columbin asked, "Where shall you be to-morrow?"

The old man pointed, "Over there," he said. "Call 'Sigisbert,' and we shall find each other soon!"

"Sigisbert, Sigisbert," joyfully repeated the boys as they walked away, looking back often until the good old man disappeared from their sight. Sigisbert's lips trembled; he was praying for his dear little friends, and begging the angels to take care of them.

CHAPTER V

THE HUT IN THE DEEP FOREST

SIGISBERT proceeded on his way through the forest, the valley widening as he went. As far as his eyes could see, it stretched onward and onward. About midday a picturesque valley opened towards the south. A little mountain stream ran through it, on its pathway to the Rhine. On the high mountains beyond, the snow gleamed in the sunshine like fire and flame. Sigisbert stood gazing at the landscape, which pleased him very much. He planted his staff on the ground, and cried: "Not one step farther! Now have I found the place of my labor and my rest. Here shall I die; here shall be my grave!"

Tired, Sigisbert sat down upon a stone,

and gazed smiling through the vistas of the old fir-trees. Why was he smiling? He knew of no house where he might dwell in winter, when it snowed and stormed. He saw no hut that might shelter him from the teeth of the hungry wolves or the claws of the bear that had torn to pieces the roe and the boy. But he put his hand in the pocket of his wide black robe and drew forth an ax and he looked smilingly upon it as he said, "Thou must help me!" At the same time he loosened the knife that hung at his girdle by its iron chain. His pale countenance grew ruddier. He looked for a fine straight branch and when found he stripped it of leaves and bark and broke it into fine pieces. These he fitted into the ax as a handle, and it was ready for hard labor. Sigisbert then stepped forward to a high, slim fir-tree, lifted his ax and swung it skillfully against the trunk. How that well-directed blow sounded through the wood! If any of the little birds were asleep in

their nests, it must surely have awakened them. Blow followed blow, the chips and splinters flew along the ground. Soon the fir-tree swayed and then sank slowly to the ground, the first tree that was to help build the house of the good old man. But there were many yet to be felled.

The sun had set. Calm, still night descended upon the tired laborer. The next morning, before the sun had risen, the strokes of the ax could be heard through the forest. Another tree lay across the first, upon the ground. Suddenly came a fresh, loud shout through the wood, and two voices called out:

“Hoho, hoho, Sigisbert!” Sigisbert answered, “Rätus! Columbin!” but his voice was neither so clear nor so loud as that of the boys. He went to meet them and brought them over to the fallen trees. Columbin had the cloth still bound around his forehead, but he and his comrade had washed their faces and hands. They opened

their eyes wide when they saw the prostrate trees, and Rätus asked :

“What are you going to do?” Sigisbert laughed and responded, “I am building a house. When it rains and snows, I must have a roof to cover me. And when the wolf or the bear comes, I must have a hut to shelter me.”

“Yes, yes,” said Columbin, coming nearer to Sigisbert. “The bear is always hungry; he tore our companion to pieces.”

“Will you help me build my house?” asked the old man.

“Yes, yes, yes, we shall be glad to help!” cried both the boys, with beaming eyes. And Rätus rubbed his hands together as if ready to begin.

Then Sigisbert gave the ax to the strong Rätus and said, “Take it and go to work. But take care of your feet. See yonder slender tree? I have hacked a mark on the bark. You may fell it; I will show you how to do it.”

Then Sigisbert made a stroke with the ax. Rätus thought he could do as well, or even better. Trembling with joy, he took the ax in his hand and swung it, ever faster and faster. More and more skilfully blow followed blow.

“Not so fast and not so wildly, my brave little Rätus, the day is long,” counseled Sigisbert. “And thou, Columbin, come with me. We will go to the little stream. We must see how thy wound is doing.”

Meanwhile Rätus wielded the ax as well as he could until a tree fell, and Sigisbert took the little Columbin by the hand and led him to the rivulet. On the way they talked of various things. Sigisbert had already observed that the delicate Columbin had a clever head, and that he could work better with his mind than his arms. Rätus with his strong brown hands could readily find employment. And Rätus and Columbin were both right courageous and cheerful. So thought Sigisbert as he washed and

dressed the wound of his little friend.

After a while they went back to the place where Rätus was working. But they no longer heard the sound of the ax, and Sigisbert said, laughing, "Aha! Rätus is tired already." As they came nearer, they saw him standing against a tree. His face was red, his eyes fixed on the ground, where lay the broken ax-handle.

Sigisbert could not help smiling as he asked, "What ails you, Rätus? You can not have done as I told you. Have you broken the handle?"

Rätus trembled but said nothing.

"A handle is soon made, my Rätus," continued the old man. "Do not be unhappy." The good Father Sigisbert so consoled his friend Rätus, that he soon became cheerful again. In a short time a new handle was ready and placed in the ax. And now Columbin wanted to try what he could do with it. But his strokes were very feeble—and he came very near hurting his little feet.

Then Sigisbert took the ax from him and said, "You are too small for this work. But you can gather moss from the stones over there." Columbin looked ashamed and hung his head. But he went over to the stones and began to gather the beautiful long moss. And so earnest was he at his work and so skilful that his little fingers began to bleed.

"Enough, enough!" cried Sigisbert at last to both of his workmen. They came to him, both covered with perspiration. "Now let us look for strawberries again," he said. It was no sooner said than done. A flat stone served as a table. Strawberries and a small piece of bread for each formed the slight repast. Alas! It was the last piece that Sigisbert had in his pocket.

Afterwards all three worked until evening. At length Sigisbert said to his helpers, "It will soon be night. Now go home to father and mother, brother and sister, that they may not be alarmed about you." Co-

lumbin dropped his head on his bosom, and looked at his thin little feet. It was not the bleeding cracks in those feet that made him feel badly ; it was that which he had now to reveal to the kind old man. Sorrowfully he looked up at Sigisbert and said, in a low voice, "We have no home, neither father nor mother ; we have no one, no one."

"But where did you spend the night?" asked Sigisbert, astonished.

"Over there, under the shadow of a great rock, on the moss, where no bear could find us. We were well sheltered," answered the sturdy Rätus. Sigisbert smiling shook his head, and Columbin said, in a low voice, "Sigisbert, we would dearly love to stay here with you." And then the boy with the gentle, lovely face smiled, as Sigisbert answered, "Now I am indeed content. Stay here with me ; there will be room enough for us three in the hut."

Again the day was done. The summer night was sweet and warm, and the three

slept soundly under the blue sky. But the next day was hard. Wood and moss for the building of the hut were gathered, and placed upon the ground as Sigisbert had decided to build his house near the great fir-tree. But on the evening of the second day he stood alone under the tree, weeping. Columbin stole softly up to him and asked him sorrowfully, "Father Sigisbert, why dost thou weep?" The old man laid his hand on the curly head of the boy and replied, "I was thinking of my home, and——"

"Oh! do not forsake us!" cried Columbin, now beginning to weep also.

"No, no, I am not going away," answered Sigisbert, "but I weep because I have nothing for you to eat."

"Oh! that does not matter, we will look for roots and herbs, as we have often done before," replied the good little boy.

Meanwhile Rätus had approached them, and Sigisbert said to the pair: "Be patient, in a short time we shall have a better table

and better food, and then your cheeks will grow plump and rosy."

On the third day they began to build. The boughs were put into position. Two long branches were laid across, one way, two shorter ones fixed firmly upon them, and so the house grew larger and larger, and higher and higher, and presently was above Sigisbert's head. Columbin was too small to help them now. He stood in front of the dwelling, repeating again and again: "Ha! Rätus is as swift as a bird, and as strong as a bear." Then small strips for laths, were laid across the walls, and over them were placed green fir branches. Sigisbert and Columbin covered up the interstices with small branches and moss. Before sundown they had made a window, and the door was hard by the trunk of the large old fir-tree.

Sigisbert had also arranged two branches in the form of a cross. Rätus fastened it to the roof, and cried out so that the birds flew

in alarm from the neighboring branches:
"God be praised and thanked."

Sigisbert had now a dwelling for himself and his dear boys, whom he already loved as a kind father loves his children. And once more night fell, and there, in the cleverly built house slumbered the trio: Sigisbert and the two boys. And high in the heavens shone the golden moon above the gloomy forest, and looked through the tiny crevices in the walls and roof, into the little hut. Good night!

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST DOMESTIC ANIMALS

THREE hungry men and not a mouthful of bread," sighed Sigisbert next morning, as he sat on a stone in front of the little dwelling. The sun was mounting upward and the morning sky seemed like a meadow full of pinks and red roses.

The birds and squirrels were all awake in the forest, but Rätus and Columbin were still asleep on their mossy bed. The labors of the preceding day had left them very tired. Sigisbert was praying. The morning sun illumined his pale countenance. Half aloud he murmured, "Dear and holy Christ Jesus, once in the wilderness thou didst feed the people with bread. Have pity on a poor old man and two helpless children!"

As he prayed he looked about him and said, "This is also a little wilderness. I would call it a miniature desert." He arose, went in search of strawberries, found some, laid them on two large green leaves, and above them repeated these words, "God bless the morning meal for two good children."

Hark! From the hut came the clear voice of Columbin, "Rätus, Rätus, get up! The sun is peeping through the windows!"

In a short time the two boys came out of the little house and stood beside the old man. "Good morning. Good morning!" he cried. "Have you both slept well? Yonder is the brook. Go and wash the sleep from your eyes. Bathe face, hands and neck well in the cool fresh water. Then come back, you will find breakfast on the table!"

Washing and a strawberry breakfast was a light and sweet task, and soon finished. Then all three seated themselves on the broad, flat stone in front of the hut. In the trees and from the roof of the little

dwelling sang the birds merrily. The three on the stone spoke to each other thus.

Said Sigisbert, "Rätus, dost thou know of many animals in the great woods?" "Oh yes," Rätus replied, "I have seen bears and wolves and smaller animals also, as many as you like."

"God protect us from the claws of the bear and the teeth of the wolf. Dost thou know of any other animals besides these?"

"O yes, there are others. They live on the high mountains where the moss and white flowers grow. What they do for food I cannot say. But they are fine and fat handsome animals, and, oh, how fast they run! They could jump over our house with one spring."

"We could not catch these animals easily," said Sigisbert. "What do you think, Columbin?"

"No, no, we can not catch them," said Rätus. "One has to be very cunning when one is in their neighborhood. But farther

still in the mountains I have seen other animals. They are not so swift and wild as the others, but neither are they so pretty."

"Now, I remember I once saw a beast like that. A man had caught him, but soon let him go again. He had big crumpled horns and long hair," said Columbin.

"Crumpled horns and long hair!" said Sigisbert. "That is the goat. My father owned fully two hundred such animals. When I was young I used to herd them in the forest and on the heath. No light labor!"

"It would not be possible to care for two hundred like these, no. Thy animals could not have been so frisky. We could not take care of two, even," said Rätus.

"Without doubt they are goats, however," said Sigisbert. "They learn very quickly to live with man. They are easily tamed."

Sigisbert stood up. The boys were already standing. When he had spoken of

having herded two hundred goats, they had risen to their feet in astonishment. The old man laid his hand on Columbin's head and said, "Now, Columbin, thou wilt stay here and take care of the house. Thou hast worked hard enough. The sun and moon can shine through the chinks and crevices of our house, and the roof is not thick enough to keep out the rain. It shall be thy task to fill up the spaces with moss. That will not take long. So now, farewell, Columbin. Thou, Rätus, come with me. We shall be back before evening."

Sigisbert and Rätus began their journey through the forest. Rätus was curious and inquired, "But whither goest thou? And what dost thou seek in the wood? Goats?"

"Yes, my Rätus, to-day we shall capture a goat," answered Sigisbert.

"Capture a goat? That will not be so easy. In summer time they go high up, seeking the richest grass. Once I caught a young one—such a pretty little thing. But

it cried so bitterly that I pitied it and let it go. It cried this way." And Rätus began to bleat like a goat. He imitated the sound so well that Sigisbert laughed aloud. When Rätus heard him he said, "Is that the way thy goats at home did?" Sigisbert nodded, and went on laughing. Yes, indeed, Sigisbert had great hopes of the quick and observant Rätus.

The sun was high in the heavens and the goat hunters were also high up in the mountains. The sharp eyes of the tireless Rätus had already perceived several goats, one, two, three. They were in a ravine between two rocks.

"Now is the time," said Sigisbert, holding his breath. "I will stay here behind these thick bushes; Rätus, do thou go to the other end of the ravine!"

But Rätus had already formed his own plan and acted upon it at once. He began to chirp like a squirrel and was soon at the narrow entrance of the

ravine. And then he began to bleat. The goats pricked up their ears. One was very large, another middle-sized and the third quite small. The two smaller animals sprang in answering the call, closer to the boy. Nearer and nearer but warily came the heavy old fellow; he paused to munch some grass, bleated, and went on. Sigisbert had watched carefully, and now stepped farther into the ravine. Rätus continued to creep along, saying softly to himself, "The old one first, and then the others very soon."

Onward they came and onward. Breathless, Rätus waited behind a stone. Now the old black goat seemed to suspect something. He looked up, ready to spring over the rocks and get away.

"Hello! hello! thou art mine," cried Rätus, with his strong hands already encircling the hind-feet of the big animal. The goat resisted, sprang up, and then fell heavily to the ground. They battled together for a short time, the boy and the goat, each

receiving some bloody scratches. Sigisbert hurried forward and cried out to the weary boy, "Hold fast, Rätus, hold fast!"

"If thou wert only in my place!" answered the boy, not without pride in his own achievement. Sigisbert produced a piece of rope and bound the goat fast under the horns; again he tried to spring away, but Rätus had strong arms and proudly led his captive down the mountain side, the other two following, bleating as they came. Sigisbert was very happy at the lucky ending of their quest.

At last they were nearly home. Rätus could not restrain himself from shouting aloud. The captive goats trembled in fear, but Columbin quickly ran out of the hut, screaming and shouting with joy. "What long horns and thick hair!" he cried. The little one was at once adopted by Columbin and began to lick his hand. The older ones could not so easily bid adieu to their former freedom. Rätus fastened them to a tree,

near the hut and said, "Now jump all you wish!" Sigisbert made a kind of bucket out of a piece of wood before the sun went down. Rätus must now learn to milk. What joy for him as the milk ran down in long white streams almost overflowing the vessel that held it. Rätus was deft and strong; if he had not been, the goat would have overturned the bucket.

To the surprise of the boys, Sigisbert now produced a small vessel made of glittering shell; he had found it on the sea-shore near his home, and had carried it with him through all his wanderings. Out of this beautiful shell they drank the fresh warm milk. This evening meal tasted so good to little Columbin that Rätus began to tease him.

"Thou drinkest more than a big man though thou hast had a comfortable, easy day," he said. But Columbin wiped the warm white milk from his lips, pointed to the hut and replied, "I have labored hard

enough. I have worked against sun, moon and rain."

And now evening had come, Sigisbert sat contentedly inside the house. The boys remained outside and Rätus related to Columbin the story of the capture of the goats, saying more than once: "Yes, indeed, it needed courage. There are more goats up there, but I am not anxious to catch them." Columbin was sleepy and began to rub his eyes. Soon was heard no more the sounds of laughing and talking in front of the hut; within slept three happy persons. The goats were likewise still, the birds sang no longer in the branches. Later the moon rose and shone over the quiet, gloomy wood.

CHAPTER VII

THE YOUNG HUNTER

A GAIN it was a lovely summer day. Sigisbert had already prayed, and sat thoughtfully in front of the hut, leaning his head on his left hand. He was thinking very seriously. Then he arose and pointed with his right hand, saying half aloud:

“There, there must the chapel stand, and there below it the houses of the village. Mine eyes are old and will never see all that, but Rätus and Columbin are young, they will have the joy of beholding it. Now see! Here they come already. Good morning. Have you both slept well?”

“Yes, and thou?” answered the pair with one voice.

“Yes. Now quick to the streamlet. Fresh

water in the morning is wholesome; it banishes sleep and makes the blood run swiftly in the veins."

"And makes one hungry, as well," answered Rätus, mischievously. Then both rushed down to the water, and soon returning stood beside their dear father, Sigisbert.

"Well, what shall we do to-day?" he asked. "Are you tired of being with me?"

"No, no," came quickly from the lips of Columbin. "We will stay with thee always, always." And Rätus cried, "We will capture more goats; it would be a fine thing if we had two hundred. Last night I dreamed that I had caught three big ones."

Sigisbert and Columbin laughed, because Rätus was always thinking of goats. Sigisbert replied that they had enough for a while with three and that it was time for Rätus to milk. He hastened to do so; Columbin drank more than Rätus and a great deal more than Sigisbert. The good father was sparing of the milk, that the boys might

have enough to keep them healthy and strong. After the meal was finished, Sigisbert helped Rätus fasten the goat to another tree, as it had eaten all the grass where it was. That task was soon done.

Then Sigisbert took the ax in his hand and blows were soon heard resounding through the wood. He had hewn a long thick bough from a tree, and seating himself on the door-sill he said, "This is something for my Rätus." The boys watched his movements intently. What was he going to do? He loosened his knife from its chain, and began to peel the leaves and bark from the bough. He pointed the thickest end; the other, about four times as long as his own hand, he left round, as it was. In this round portion the good workman made a little groove, smooth as glass, just wide enough for one to lay his finger. But it was not yet ready. Sigisbert's knife had a strong nail in the handle. With the nail he soon made two holes, one through the thick part

of the wood through the groove—Columbin could stick his little finger in it—and another, at the other end of the bough, cross-wise—Rätus could put his thumb into this.

“What is that going to be?” asked Rätus, full of curiosity.

“That is a cross-bow for Rätus,” answered Sigisbert. “Now I still need a stout cord. Go Rätus, and fetch me some hairs from the goat, about twice as long as my arm. But do not let him get away.” Rätus went and did as he was bidden, and came back singing, “That is my cross-bow, ho-ho, my cross-bow!”

Meanwhile Sigisbert had taken another but thinner piece of wood, which he fitted into the largest hole. Rätus stood ready with the rope. Sigisbert bound it fast on both ends and thus strung the bow. Crack, crack! The wood was not strong enough, it broke. A second piece was better. “That is a stick like thine!” cried Columbin. Sigisbert did not answer. He cut a piece

of wood, the length of his hand, and fitted it snugly into the groove. Then he made another incision where the little hole was. He strung the bow, and the cord was inserted in the space that had been cut out. Then he cut another little piece of wood for the smaller hole that could be pushed up and down, moving the cord with it.

“See now. Are thine eyes as quick as my arrow?” asked Sigisbert. He lifted the cross-bow in the air, pressing the bit of wood with his finger. It loosened the cord from the groove, and then with a whiz and a buzz the shaft flew over the highest tree. “Hei, hei, hallo!” shouted Rätus, as swiftly returning the arrow lodged in the ground at their feet.

“Now, Rätus’ cross-bow is ready,” said Sigisbert. “Try it, Rätus, and see what kind of a shot thou art. Thou hast a good eye and a steady arm. That ought to ensure a good shot, and a good huntsman.”

The words had scarcely passed the old

man's lips before Rätus stepped forward, the arrow in his hand. He took the bow and strung it. It was not easy to handle. But Rätus who had hewn logs in the building of the hut knew also how to bend a bough. He aimed at the trunk of a tree. He was not unhandy with the cross-bow—but it was the first time he had used it. It hummed and whirred, and the arrow flew. “Missed. Missed!” cried Columbin, and ran quickly to pick it up.

“I have hit it! I have hit it!” exclaimed Rätus, and pointed to the arrow sticking in the white bark of the tree. Then Columbin ran to Sigisbert and cried merrily, “He has hit it!”

Never in his life had Rätus known a greater joy than he experienced in this, his first successful shot. Sigisbert made five more arrows, and said to Rätus, “Now go into the forest a little while, but take care where thou wanderest and beware of wild beasts. And come back soon. Thou wilt

find Columbin and me down by the brook.”

Full of delight, Rätus took his bow and arrow and disappeared into the wood. Sigisbert and Columbin went hand in hand to the stream. And as they walked they heard Rätus shouting joyfully from afar.

CHAPTER VIII

THE YOUNG FISHERMAN

HOW lovely it was near the brook! On either bank stood fir-trees and bushes; a real home for the birds. They sang so loud and clear one seeming to out-vie the other! A water-ouzel hopped from stone to stone, and went back without soiling its feathers. And high in the air swept a hawk; it seemed to be shrieking, "Fly, fly!" Sigisbert and Columbin were standing on this beautiful spot, looking at the infant Rhine, which at this place flowed calmly along. It was a deep stream now, and the water was of a dark green color.

"There thou wilt find animals—fishes!" said Sigisbert. "Columbin, thou has good

eyes, dost thou see no fish at the bottom of the stream?" Columbin looked so intently into the water that it made him dizzy. But he saw nothing and glancing up laughingly at Sigisbert he said, "There may be fish down in the water, but my arm is too short to reach them."

"We shall make thy arm longer," replied Sigisbert, as he began to cut off a straight, slender branch. On the smaller end he fastened a cord, which he had taken from the pocket of his black gown. Columbin said in surprise, "Thou hast everything in thy gown!" And Sigisbert answered, "Oh, not much, only what it was necessary to bring. I did not dare to come with empty hands into a land entirely unknown to me." Then Sigisbert with his useful knif, cut a hooked piece from a smaller bough, and fastened it to the cord. And to the upper part of the hook he tied a stone.

Columbin wondered what strange thing Sigisbert had fashioned. When he heard

that it was an angle to catch fish, he shook his head. He did not think any fish would be so foolish as to fasten itself to the hook. Sigisbert laughed and said, "Columbin, go and find me a big worm in the earth, and kill it, so that I may fasten it to the end of this hook." But Columbin shook his head again and said, "That I can not do, Father Sigisbert. I dare not kill a poor worm; tell Rätus to do it!" How Sigisbert rejoiced at the good heart of his dear little Columbin! "Good!" he cried. "We will wait until Rätus comes. Yonder is an open space carpeted with delicate moss. Let us sit there, and I will tell thee something," and with these words Sigisbert led his little expectant pupil to the soft, inviting spot.

They seated themselves on the thick moss. Sigisbert began: "Dost thou not remember over there in the wood by the great fir-tree when thou didst first see me and thought, 'There is a wild man?' I am not a wild man,

only a stranger, whose home is far, far from here."

"But some day, I will climb that high, high mountain yonder and then perhaps I may see thy home," replied the child.

"Oh, no, it lies a thousand times farther away than thine eyes can see," answered Sigisbert. "It is a beautiful and fertile land. The house where I lived with my father, mother and sister stood near a river which is much larger than this one. There were fish in abundance. Men, women and children could catch them with rod and angle, and even with their hands. Once I was in great danger. My foot slipped and in a moment I had fallen into the water. The waves had already begun to dash me about like an atom. But I was young and swift in those days as a bird. I reached for the branch of a tree on the bank of the river and with one spring I was again on land."

Columbin listened with open mouth. A tear shone in his blue eyes. He wanted to

hear it all over again, and Sigisbert was obliged to tell him the story two or three times.

“Hello, there!” What a clear, joyous shout! That was Rätus. Columbin shouted in reply. Soon Rätus appeared, dripping with perspiration. Over his shoulder hung his cross-bow, and in his right hand was a large dead bird. Its breast was still bleeding.

“See what I have shot!” cried Rätus, his voice trembling with joy. “It was on the top of a tree and had a little bird fast in its beak. I aimed, and fr-r-r-r, I hit! The creature fell over all the branches and leaves to the ground, it broke its wing—but to hit is to hit—it was dead very soon. There it is!”

“Thou hast aimed well, Rätus!” said Sigisbert, praising the young sportsman. Columbin stood in amazement, gazing now at the bird, now at the young hunter. On his part Rätus laughed jubilantly, crying,

“What do you think of my work? Take the bird in your hand and feel how heavy it is!”

Meanwhile Sigisbert had cut a little piece of flesh from the dead bird. He fastened it to the fishing-hook, and calling Columbin said to him, “Columbin, thou art small, and not strong. With thy little arm thou canst not string a bow. But thou canst catch fish. Here take thy rod and dip the line in the water!” Columbin obeyed; seated himself upon the bank and did as he was told. But there were no fish on the hook, no matter how often he drew it up. And that he did more than twenty times. Finally he became impatient. But Sigisbert said to him, “Remain still, until the hook grows heavy.” Another while he waited. Then he cried, “Now, now, it feels heavy! But I dare not lift the hook. I am afraid of the animals.” Sigisbert hastened to his assistance. One pull, and soon a fine fish lay upon the grassy bank. It was a magnificent trout. It wig-

gled, opened its mouth, and soon lay quiet and lifeless.

Sigisbert was as rejoiced at the good luck of the boys as they were themselves. They went back to the hut. Rätus carried the bow and hawk, Columbin the angle and trout. Columbin was no longer afraid of the fish and said, "To-morrow I will catch three more!"

CHAPTER IX

THE KITCHEN

“**N**OW lay the cross-bow and the fishing-rod near the hut in the shade,” said Sigisbert. “Just so. The hawk and the fish you must take into the house. Then come, for I have something to show you.”

The boys followed him as quickly as they could, and stood before him. He had seated himself on a large stone. “We have built a house,” said he, “but we have forgotten the kitchen. Whoever wants a good table must also have a kitchen and a fireplace. Now we must build the kitchen. Over there by the bank of the stream are fine flat stones. Fetch some!” No sooner had the old man spoken than the boys sprang forward. In a few moments they

were back again, each with a heavy, flat stone in his arms.

Sigisbert selected the thickest and laid the other beside it. The light footed stone-bearers went back and forth, bringing more flat rocks. "Now we have enough," said Sigisbert. "Carry this into the house. Yonder in the corner of our little house is the best place. Behind the door we can keep our wood, and we shall have a fine kitchen." The little artisans helped their master. Columbin came to grief once or twice by catching his fingers between two great stones, and though he cried out, he did not shed any tears; he did not want to hinder the building of the kitchen, and the pain was soon over.

"In time I hope to have easier and better employment for those little fingers. Columbin," said Sigisbert.

The largest stone was laid on the ground; behind it and on both sides were placed two other stones. The spaces between them

were filled with earth and smaller stones. Sigisbert knew well how to build a fireplace. How hard it would be otherwise to keep fire in his house.

Yes, fire and flame. But whence must it come? "Have you ever seen fire?" asked Sigisbert. "I know, I know," cried Columbin. "It thunders, and strikes a tree, and then we go quickly and get the fire." Sigisbert replied, smilingly, "Look up at the sky and thou wilt see that we cannot wait until the thunder sets fire to a tree for us. In that case we could not cook and eat the fish. Come children we will go and get some fire."

Close to an old dead pine tree Sigisbert paused and cried, "Halt!" The branches were withered, there was not a single green one on the whole tree. Sigisbert bent down a bough. It cracked and fell to the ground, now another, and they turned back home, Rätus dragging the branches, while Columbin asked ruefully, "But where is the fire?"

"Wait, wait, there is fire in these withered boughs," answered Sigisbert. But the boy shook his little head. Sigisbert called the child to him, and broke one of the boughs, but Columbin still shook his head sadly, "I see no fire," said he. "This branch has no fire in it."

Sigisbert did not reply, but took two pieces of the withered branch. Then he pressed one against the wall of the hut and rubbed it quickly and skilfully with the other.

It took a long time. "A spark! ho ho, a spark!" Columbin had seen one. Now another, and another, more and more. The boy gazed in astonishment. Sigisbert rubbed harder, one branch was burning, now the other. "Quick, throw some old dry wood on the hearth." Soon a great, beautiful fire was burning in the wide fireplace. Rätus and Columbin were beside themselves with joy. They watched the fire, with its glittering sparks, and their

faces were red, lit up by the flame. But what a smoke it made! The tears sprang into Columbin's blue eyes. Sigisbert told him to go out in the air for a while. Rätus did not spare the wood. The smoke rose through the crevices in the roof and ascended into the air. Columbin rushed into the hut crying, "Fire, fire!" But the sparks could not penetrate the wooden walls. Sigisbert laid a flat thin stone on the glowing coals, and after cleaning it placed the fish upon it. "My, what a good smell!" cried Columbin, and Rätus said, "Sigisbert, I will stay by the fire, and mind the fish. The fire is not good for thine eyes!"

In a short time the fish, nicely browned, lay on the table, which was only a broad flat stone. But how good the pieces tasted, that Sigisbert cut with his knife. Sigisbert also ate a little. Then he sat meditating. He was thinking of the time when on the lake of Genesareth the apostles had caught and cooked a fish for their divine

Master. Rätus and Columbin ate on and on. After they had finished, Rätus began to throw more wood on the fire. Sigisbert forbade him and said, "Thou must fear the fire." Both boys then promised him that they would not play with it.

The day had departed, and evening was come. It was very still in the wood; even the goats were silent. In the hut also it was still. Columbin only was restless. He had a frightful dream. Once he sprang up and cried aloud, "Fire, fire, the roof is burning and the hut!" God be praised, Columbin, it was only a dream.

CHAPTER X

SUNDAY IN THE FOREST

IT was a lovely morning. The birds had already flown from the roof of the little hut, waking the sleepers with their joyous morning song. But Sigisbert was up early, as usual. He sat in front of his house and prayed. He knew it was Sunday, the Lord's day. Within the hut the two boys sat on a bench. The elder had already taken his cross-bow in his hands, and was stringing it as he said, "Yesterday I had no luck. I shot only a hawk, that no one can eat. To-day I shall have better success."

Sigisbert wished to be for a time alone. Near the hut he felt restless. He went into the wood and presently came to a little stream. What a beautiful spot it was!

The forest brook, flowers blooming everywhere, the swaying branches full of birds, the blue heavens without a single cloud. In the distance the snowy peaks of the mountains glistened in the sun like flaming candles on a beautiful altar. There could Sigisbert pray from the depths of his heart.

Sunday in the deep woods was not like Sunday in the cloister, where Sigisbert formerly had his home. In the forest there were no pealing bells, in the forest were no pious canticles, in the forest were no people gathered together. Sigisbert lifted his eyes and sighed. "To-day is Sunday in the convent. Ah! I am no longer in the cloister, I am far, far away from my brethren. And I am farther still from my beloved home, from my dear, green Ireland." Then he knelt down by a large rock, and prayed a long time.

Meanwhile Rätus had plucked the feathers from his hawk, and milked the goat.

It had become somewhat tamer and gave a bucketful of milk. The two young goats gambolled hither and thither like merry boys at play.

Columbin went with his rod to the brook and caught a fine trout. He did not know it was Sunday. Otherwise he would have caught it the evening before.

Columbin came back to the hut carrying the heavy fish in his hand. Sigisbert had also returned. All three drank of the sweet milk. Columbin wanted to broil the fish, but he was told to lay it on the table and keep it for dinner. Such was the wish of Father Sigisbert, and the boys obeyed him without a murmur.

Then Sigisbert took the boys outside to a neighboring hill. A fir-tree with broad branches stood upon it. A lovely spot! Sigisbert sat down on a mossy stone and the boys seated themselves on the grassy earth at his feet. Then Sigisbert said, "My dear children! See the sun is abroad

in the blue sky. Who has given us this light and heat? Who suspends it in the heavens? Last night the beautiful stars were shining. We could not count them. Who kindled their light? And look about you! How many beautiful flowers there are! Who has made them so numerous, so brilliant and so beautiful? Columbin, pluck yonder flower! Couldst thou make such a flower? No, thou couldst not."

Columbin shook his head and asked, "Canst thou, Sigisbert, make a flower like that? Perhaps thou canst." And he was disappointed when Sigisbert answered, "Oh, indeed, I can not. A thousand persons together could not make a single leaf like this. But who has made the sun, moon and stars?"

Columbin's eyes lit up as he answered, "I have never thought about who made the sun, moon and stars, the mountains and these flowers. When I was a very little boy these things were already made."

Sigisbert spoke to them a long time, telling him how large were the land and sea. Rätus and Columbin listened to him with wondering eyes. At last he stood up and asked, "Who made all these things? The good God. We cannot see Him; but we see the things He has made. Oh, how powerful and good He must be! To Him belong the heavens, and the earth belongs to Him. He is the Father of all men and we must obey Him and love Him."

And Sigisbert prayed with folded hands. "Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name!" Columbin, canst thou say it?"

Then Columbin clasped his hands, looked up to the beautiful blue sky and repeated, "Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name!"

And now it was noon. As on Sunday the people passed from the church to their homes, so went Sigisbert, Rätus and Columbin back to the hut. They had worshiped

God in the open air. Rätus made the fire to cook the fish. No one knew better how to work well and quickly than Rätus. But Columbin had understood and reflected more on the words and teaching of Sigisbert, than his larger comrade. The broiled fish made a delicious meal. Afterwards Rätus tried his bow and arrow. It went well—he had a keen eye, and his arm did not tremble. But he had no chance of trying his arrow against beast or bird. Sigisbert had said to the little huntsman, “To-day thou must not go hunting. This is Sunday, the Lord’s day.”

CHAPTER XI

IN AUTUMN

THE days were growing shorter. The flowers withered; the grass turned yellow, the pine-needles lay scattered on the ground. One September day a flock of swallows alighted on the roof of the hut. They remained in the neighborhood until next morning. The mountains put on their white caps and the swallows flew in a long straight line over the hills to the land of the South.

Many clouds and many thunder-storms gathered above the lonely hut in the forest. In these days the inmates were almost always at home, Sigisbert and his dear little boys. It would have broken good old Sigisbert's heart if they had left him. They were his greatest joy on earth.

But why did they always remain with him? Why did they not return to their home? They had none—neither house nor roof to cover them, no hand to offer them food, no friendly glance to meet their own save his. They so loved to stay with Father Sigisbert, that the longer they were with him the better they loved him. Sigisbert would have taken the last piece of bread from his mouth to give it to the children, and he could tell them such beautiful things of their Father in heaven who was so good.

One Sunday morning Sigisbert went into the forest with Rätus and Columbin, to the banks of a beautiful little brooklet. There he baptized them, for they had been well prepared by his instructions and had done all things as he had bidden them. Columbin, especially, felt wonderfully happy; he could never forget the wonderful Sunday, and had long conversations with Sigisbert; much to say and many questions to ask.

There came a rainy autumn day. Gray clouds gathered above the mountains. The Rhine and the forest brook were full of water. The three inmates of the little hut sat by the fire and spoke to one another somewhat as follows: Said Sigisbert, "If people live in this part of the country why do they never come near us?"

Replied Rätus, "Oh, they may come yet. Far below in the valley there are numbers of people. Down there the valley is broader. Let us go some time and explore it."

"And leave our hut?" answered Sigisbert. "No, no, here our village must be situated. We have built the first house. People will come to us, and then this forest will become a beautiful country. What kind of men live down there, Rätus?"

"Many of them are very good, and have finer houses than ours," said Columbin. "But they do not know of the good Father who is in heaven. Some of them are wicked

and half savage. Oh, I would not like to make them angry. They meet together at night in the wood, but they do not pray as we pray. They quarrel with each other, and dead men are often seen lying in the forest."

Said Rätus, "I often wonder why none of them have ever come to our hut, that they have not found our hiding-place."

Sigisbert was sad and reflected deeply.

The heavens were blue once more. All three left the hut, each one to his labor. Rätus took his bow and repaired to the forest, Columbin took his rod and went fishing.

Sigisbert on his part, was not idle. He was making a small spade out of wood to use around the house. When he had finished it, he began to dig in the earth. Large drops of sweat rolled down his face. He had upturned a considerable piece of ground when Columbin appeared, bringing three fine trout.

Soon Rätus returned also. And how joyful he was! He carried a roe on both shoulders. It was a beautiful brown animal, not very large, but a splendid prize, and in the middle of its breast was a gaping wound. The young hunter cried out, "Look, look, I have shot it through the heart!" Sigisbert rejoiced at the game, and praised the hunter. "That is something, now, Rätus," he said. "Thou art a hunter. I will now show thee how to skin the roe and also how to cut it up. Here take my knife. It is dainty food. And the skin we shall hang to dry under the roof; it will make a good winter garment for thee."

They labored long until the fish, the meat, and the deer-skin were prepared as they should be. Then something unusual befell, and little Columbin was filled with curiosity and joy. Sigisbert took from a beam under the roof a small bag, that the boys had never before seen. In the sack was a

species of grayish-yellow corn which Sigisbert had brought with him over the mountain. Columbin gazed at him with wide eyes and wondered what was going to happen. Sigisbert looked at him and said, "There is not much of it. I am too old to carry a great deal. I brought this little bit of corn on these old shoulders under my black gown. Gladly would I it had been more, for your sakes. But now come with me to the front of the house."

The three went out, Sigisbert took a handful of corn from the sack, stepped slowly here and there among the brown furrows, and scattered the corn in the loose earth. Columbin counted; there were fifteen handfuls. But neither Columbin nor Rätus could comprehend what Sigisbert was doing. He now took a long branch and drew it over the furrows as he went along. Soon all the corn was covered, and Sigisbert had planted his little field, the first field in the forest. And now he

had time to explain what he had been doing to his bewildered little friends. And Columbin cried out, full of joy, as he clapped his hands together. "Oh, if the spring were only here! I will see then whether the corn will come out of the ground."

"It can be seen already in the autumn," answered Sigisbert, "Thou wilt not have to wait till spring!"

"But then it will have to go back into the earth again," said Rätus, "or the winter will be too cold for it."

"No, no, the snow is a warm cloak," said Sigisbert to the incredulous Rätus.

And now came evening, and the night. The next morning Rätus had work to do with the ax. He made a fence around the field. But was that enough? The goats could not graze there any more, when the green grass should come again. But the sparrows flew up and down, picking the grayish-yellow corn. The saucy thieves! Columbin was greatly discomfited by the

little robber-folk, and had all he could do to drive them away. But Rätus came to the rescue. He covered the plot with fir-branches. Soon one and then another shoot appeared above the ground where the grains had not been deeply planted.

CHAPTER XII

A SORROWFUL NIGHT

SEPTEMBER came to an end; the last day of the month was dark and gloomy. It was as sultry as in summer, black clouds covered the heavens. It was like night, without the stars. Darker, darker, it grew, over mountain and valley. Sigisbert, Rätus and Columbin sat in the hut; a fire burned on the hearth. Sigisbert was telling the boys the story of the storm on the lake of Genesareth when the apostles were frightened, and how, at the command of Jesus, the wind and waves sank to rest. While he was speaking heavy rain-drops began to fall on the roof. The thunder roared, and lightning flashed through the crevices of the

hut. Columbin trembled with fear, lest the lightning might set fire to the little house. But Father Sigisbert stood up and prayed on that gloomy evening as follows:

“We pray Thee, O God, protect our dwelling, and drive far away the persecution of the demons. Make Thy holy angels to dwell herein, and preserve us in peace. And Thy benediction be upon us forever!”

But what was that? The voice of a man? Or was it the cry of the goats? Nay, they were under shelter. In the last few days Rätus had made them a little stable not far from the hut.

Again a cry. Columbian peeped through the opening in the wall of the hut, and said softly, “Now I know what it is. That is a man. God knows what he wants! ‘Our Father, Who art in heaven.’”

Rätus was more courageous. He went out to the front of the hut. How the lightning flashed, how crashed the thunder! And the darkness grew deeper. The rain rushed

down through the fir-trees. Then came a flash longer and more vivid. All around it was as bright as noonday. Rätus peered through the entrance of the hut crying, "Quick, quick, come." Sigisbert and Columbin ran to his side; their eyes striving to pierce the gloomy night. Sigisbert said to Columbin, "Stay thou in the hut! Fear not, the good angel is with thee. Rätus take thy bow and arrow! I will bring my ax and a burning brand. Danger is probably near; now let us go forth, in God's name!"

Quickly and fearlessly Sigisbert and Rätus went in the direction from which the cries had come. Sigisbert carried the ax and the torch, his companion had the bow across his shoulder. Directly in front of them were two men with long beards and thick clubs in their hands. Oh, those wild eyes! Rätus had already seen them. A third man lay stretched on the ground. He rolled his eyes and groaned. One of the

robbers held him at the throat, the other pressed down the knees of the poor unfortunate. They did not see Sigisbert and Rätus. Suddenly the old man stepped forward, swung the ax and waved the flashing brand backward and forward, saying with a loud voice, "Stop, murderers! Stop, murderers!" Both men sprang up. The man in the long black robe, the gleaming ax, the powerful voice; all these things had alarmed the robbers. They were pale with fear.

Once more Sigisbert cried, "Away ye murderers, or ye shall die!" Rätus came nearer. He pointed his arrow and exclaimed, "Be off, assassins, or I will shoot you in the eyes. Off, or your lives shall pay the forfeit!"

Meanwhile the poor wounded man had somewhat revived. The robbers fled and disappeared in the forest. The lightning quivered, the thunder pealed, the rain fell heavily. Rätus would have sent an arrow

after the men, but Sigisbert forbade him.

The poor man on the ground had many wounds, some of which were deep. With a great deal of trouble Sigisbert and Rätus removed him to the hut. Columbin stood by the fire, praying aloud. When he saw the wounds of the prostrate man, tears began to flow from his eyes. Rätus went quickly and brought water. Willingly or unwillingly, the goat was made to furnish some milk at this unusual hour, and the warm drink was very welcome to the poor wounded man who thanked them heartily. But Sigisbert warned him not to speak. The poor man sank again to the floor and soon slept, but he had no rest in his slumber. He tossed about crying, "Help! help!" He had fearful dreams. Columbin came nearer, washed his wounds and laid a soft, cool cloth on the burning forehead of the stranger. After a long, long time, morning dawned. The birds sang joyfully above the roof of the hut. They knew naught of the sorrowful night that had just passed.

CHAPTER XIII

PREPARING FOR WINTER

THE wounded man now made a fourth in the little family that dwelt in the hut. Four had at least a temporary refuge under the little roof—what joy! Peace reigned in the tiny house. The morning after the eventful night, Sigisbert had said to the children, “We must do good to all, especially the poor and unfortunate. What we do to them, we do to God himself.” Columbin had a very kind heart. He drew fresh water, got fresh milk, and washed the wounds of the suffering man, who was deeply grateful. But Columbin would reply, “Do not thank me. Our Father in heaven will count it for me twofold.” Tears often glistened in the man’s eyes.

His wounds healed one by one; he became stronger and occasionally went outside. After a few moments, Sigisbert would say to him, "When you are quite well you can go farther." Gradually his painful wounds were healed. Nowhere in the world had he found such kindness as in this hut in the forest. He had formerly been a pedler, and had carried his wares over the mountains. But his unlucky adventure had given him a distaste for that business. On long journeys one is in great danger from wicked men.

The month of October began. It was the finest autumn weather. The sky was clear and cloudless. Rätus had taken advantage of the fine days and had shot three roes. The meat and skins had been made ready for use in the long, long winter.

One evening, Rätus made a new bow. That night his sleep was restless. Early in the morning he was in front of the hut, running uneasily up and down, and gazing

at the mountains. Sigisbert sat on a stone before the house; Columbin and the man came out of the hut also. Rätus went to them and said,

“Father Sigisbert, I want to go to-day, very badly.”

Sigisbert looked at him intently and asked, “Wilt thou then forsake us, Rätus?”

“No, no, not forever,” replied the boy. “But to-day I am anxious to go—to find a chamois. Yesterday I saw a trail. Oh, I beg that thou wilt let me go!” While he spoke thus, Columbin shook his head and said, “He has the mountains and the chamois on the brain. Isn’t he too young to go chamois-hunting?” Sigisbert hesitated. But the stranger measured the young agile Rätus from head to foot with his eye and said, “He does not fear hardship. Perhaps he is too eager. But these arrows are too light for chamois. It is easier to kill bears than chamois.”

Rätus looked beseechingly at Sigisbert,

and from him to the mountains. But he could not utter a word now of the wish that was in his heart.

Sigisbert knew his Rätus and laying one hand on the boy's shoulder, he said,

"Good, thou mayst go. But promise me that thou wilt not knowingly court danger. Throw not thy life away for a chamois. On the road pray to thy guardian angel. Go then—in God's name!"

Rätus did not move; one little wish was in his heart, one little word upon his tongue.

"Now, Rätus, what is it?" asked Sigisbert.

"These arrows—well—they cannot bring down any chamois," murmured Rätus. "I ought to have an iron arrow—I knew that."

"Now, out with the rest," cried Sigisbert.

"The iron—from thy long staff," murmured Rätus.

Sigisbert and the stranger could not help smiling; Columbin stood in surprise.

"The iron point of my long staff thou shalt have," said Sigisbert. "I shall need it no longer. I shall journey no more across the mountains."

That was the answer of the good Father Sigisbert. He took the ax, struck off the point of the staff and gave it to the young huntsman with these words: "Go thou in God's name," and Rätus departed. They heard his shouts from afar. Sigisbert remained alone talking with the stranger. He had much to say, and a great deal to ask. He sent the good little Columbin down to the brook with the goats.

It was hard work for Columbin. The old goat he led by a rope. It was always restless; it had not forgotten the free, wild life of the mountains, but a good herdboys was Columbin; there was not another as happy and contented in the whole land of Rhoetia. He led the goats to the best feeding-place. The flowers were already dead, and the grass fast turning yellow.

He fastened the goats to a tree. He knew that in winter time the grass was covered with snow. Therefore with skilful hands he plucked a quantity and bound it into bundles. During the last week he had gathered nearly a hundred bundles of grass and put them in the little stable near the hut against the hard winter days.

“That is enough for to-day,” said Columbin at last, and seating himself he began to recite aloud the story of the shepherds of Bethlehem. Then he repeated as Sigisbert had taught him, “Glory to God on high, and peace on earth to men of good will!” Why should not Columbin be happy? He had never done any evil. After a while he grew sleepy. He lay down on the grass and slept and dreamed—of the angels and shepherds of Bethlehem.

Rätus had a more strenuous day. He had no time for slumber. How did it fare with him on the chamois hunt? He had not forgotten to repeat the little prayer.

But, as Columbin had said, he had the mountains and the chamois on the brain. But the arrow! It was not sharp enough; so the wise little hunter sought in the neighboring streamlet a hard round stone. He rubbed the iron point upon this, until it was bright and keen. Then he cried, "To-day this arrow shall be red with the blood of a chamois." And as he journeyed he said to himself, "Am I not a wicked Rätus? But I will not molest the beautiful animals in the mountains. I will gather nuts for them. That is right, Sigisbert said so. And I will not shoot the mother of the kid on the way. Now I must go farther and farther. In this beautiful weather the chamois wanders higher, and higher."

Without pause or rest Rätus mounted upward and ever upward. Ha! there on a rock stood a chamois, keeping guard. There were others all about him, some standing, some lying down. Rätus crept on hands and knees through a stony pas-

ture-valley, holding on to the rocks, bleeding, but always coming nearer. "My bow will reach so far!" he said at last, and kneeling behind a stone drew it on his prey. "Fly, poor beautiful chamois, fly!"

Too late! the arrow with the sharp iron point whizzed through the air and into the breast of the chamois that had been keeping watch. The poor dear animal gave a shrill cry, "Pff—pff," made one spring and fell headlong. The others scampered off to their retreat. Rätus sprang from his ambush. "Hit, hit!" he cried joyfully. From the brown breast of the stricken chamois blood was flowing on the gray stones. The animal looked at the hunter with its great pleading eyes, lifted itself once on its front paws, sank to earth again, and died. Rätus drew the arrow from the breast of the dead chamois, a torrent of blood followed it. The boy could not restrain his joy at the success of his enterprise; his shouts echoed again and again through the rocky defiles.

But how to get home? How could Rätus drag the heavy chamois down the mountain to the hut. No fear! He was strong and joy lightened his labor. Carefully he drew the chamois over the stony ground. The beautiful skin must not be torn. But the load was too heavy. He pulled some branches from a neighboring tree, and laid the chamois upon them. And so he began to make his way to the valley. Soon he realized that he must use some other means of carrying the chamois. He succeeded in putting it on his shoulders, but they were not made of iron. He rested and shouted for help. Then with joy he perceived the stranger approaching. Sigisbert had sent him out to meet the hunter. The man cried out in astonishment, "Thou art indeed a hunter!" and lifted the chamois on his own broad shoulders. Rätus walked beside him, not a little proud of his success. Soon they came to the hut. Sigisbert had never seen a chamois, and could not help admir-

ing the wonderful animal from the high mountains. And now Columbin appeared with his little flock. He could hardly fasten his charge in the stable, and put his bundles of grass with the rest, so astonished was he at the sight of the beautiful dead cham-
ois.

Now came the labor of skinning the beast, and dividing the meat in suitable pieces, as well as hanging it in the proper places to dry for the winter. While they were working Rätus entertained them with the story of his day's hunting, and Columbin listened with delight.

By the time they had finished the stars were shining above the dark wood. Soon the four inmates of the hut lay fast asleep. What glorious dreams must have passed through the brain of the happy huntsman—Rätus!

L O F C

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEED OF BREAD

IT was a beautiful morning in October. Rätus and Columbin were still sleeping like logs, but Sigisbert had waked the stranger early, and they had gone together into the forest.

Then they went through the wood towards the valley. It had been a cold night, and frost lay on the grass. Sigisbert shivered; the tips of his fingers were blue and now and again he clapped his hands together to warm them. But he joyfully endured both heat and cold for the love of God. After a while they came to a little hill. Sigisbert surveyed the landscape; forest, everywhere forest! He sat down on the trunk of a tree and said to his com-

panion, "How lovely would it not be in this place if one could here and there see a village, or an inn. These sunny slopes would then present an entirely different aspect. How would I instruct the people in the little hamlets, as one cultivates a field, or makes a tree to bear fruit. How joyfully would I gather the children around me, to teach them and make them happy. But mine eyes are growing old. Before these things come to pass, I shall be in my grave." So saying, he leaned his head upon his cold hand, and a tear fell upon the folds of his black robe. "Weep not, good Father Sigisbert!" said the man. Sigisbert rose to his feet and said, "Wilt thou help me? Then perhaps I may see a little village there, before I die."

The stranger said nothing, but gave the old man his right hand, and Sigisbert understood his meaning. They began to retrace their steps. The man told what he knew of the people of the country; they

might not all be as good as Rätus and Columbin, but they were industrious folk. Away yonder, where the Rhine broadened into a real river, were villages; it might be a good thing if Sigisbert were to go down and visit the people. But Sigisbert smiled and said, "No, I cannot do that. I will not build my house and my little village where other houses already are. There, yonder in the woodland landscape stands my little hut. The others must come to me and build their dwellings close to mine."

With conversation such as this they found themselves again at the door of the hut.

Rätus had already milked the goats and the milk was on the table. Columbin sat near his little flock and sang. As they took their morning meal Columbin said to Sigisbert, "Father Sigisbert, we have prayed so often, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' I do not know any more how the last morsel of bread tasted, it is so long since we

ate it. Tell us, Father Sigisbert, when our heavenly Father will send us bread?"

"My child," answered Sigisbert, "God, who feeds the ravens and the sparrows, will also take care of that. But we must labor and earn our bread by the sweat of our brows."

"But when shall we have bread from our field?" asked Rätus.

"In a year we shall be eating bread from our field," answered Sigisbert. "Come now, let us sit awhile in front of the hut. Come, the autumn sun will warm us a little. I want to talk to you."

All four went out and sat near the hut—it was a little friendly gathering. Sigisbert said, "Already winter looks down upon us from the mountains. Columbin, dost thou not see the snow? The winter will last long, while we shall stay shut in here. Columbin, hast thou noticed how the ants in summer gather corn for the winter? They are an example to us."

"We have meat and milk," said Rätus.

"To eat meat only is not healthy. Columbin especially needs bread. And the milk will give out also; we cannot expect it the whole year through. We must have corn, we must have——"

At these words the stranger stood up and said sorrowfully, "That is true. And grieved am I to have by my presence here placed you still more in need. If you say so, I will leave you. It were——"

"No more, no more!" interrupted Sigisbert, while Rätus and Columbin cried, "No, thou must not go."

Touched, the man again sat down, and passed his hand over his eyes. "You are too good to me," he said. "But far over there beyond the southern mountains there is a beautiful fruitful land. There smile lovely corn-fields—oh—were they but here!"

"Cheer up!" said Sigisbert. "Corn we must have. Who will fetch it?" The words

had but passed his lips when Rätus sprang up, exclaiming, "I will. Let me go, Father Sigisbert."

Columbin smiled, "Thou wishest to do everything, Rätus!" he said. "But who will give thee corn, and thou wouldst not steal it?"

But Sigisbert looked at the stranger and asked:

"Wilt thou go with Rätus?"

"Yes, I will gladly go with Rätus," he replied. "But how shall we pay for the corn?"

Father Sigisbert arose, went into the hut and soon returned, carrying a slender chain in his hand. My, how it sparkled in the sun! Columbin's eyes grew big, but Rätus asked immediately, "Where didst thou get that chain, Father Sigisbert? What beautiful iron that is! May I take it in my hand? Ha! it is quite heavy."

Sigisbert replied, "The chain is made of gold. My sister gave it to me, when I was

leaving my home. In the monastery I gave the chain to the Abbot. He returned it to me when I left the cloister to come here to you. The little gold cross on the end of the chain was given me by my Abbot; I must take care of that. But with the chain we can conduct our business. My sister, who had a warm kind heart, would be glad to know that we could use it in that way—to relieve our wants. I believe that with a single link one may purchase a small sack of corn.”

Columbin had fixed his eyes upon the beautiful shining crucifix, and he said, “It was on a cross that the dear God was crucified and died for us.”

Sigisbert then said to Rätus, “Thou must bind the chain around thy neck and conceal it under thy clothing. And do not lose it; nor show it to any one upon the way! A robber would no sooner cast eyes upon thy treasure than he would attack thee.”

“As I was attacked,” said the stranger.

The preparations of the travelers were soon completed. Rätus took the cross-bow, the man carried the ax. Rätus was delighted and said to Columbin, "If we meet a robber or a wild beast on the way, they will have to reckon with me, Columbin."

Sigisbert gave the travelers some advice and directions, clasped their hands at parting, and wished them a safe return. They departed. As they disappeared in the forest, Columbin's voice could be heard calling, "A good journey, a good journey."

CHAPTER XV

WHAT SIGISBERT AND COLUMBIN DID

“**W**HEN will our two traders return?” asked Columbin of Sigisbert the following morning.

“They can be here in eight days. The time will seem long to thee, Columbin, without Rätus. But if we are working it will pass quickly. I am old and feeble; thou art young and hast not the strongest arm. But thou and I together can accomplish something. When the corn is ready we must have an oven to bake our bread.” Then Sigisbert took a piece of wood, measured it on the floor and said, “So large must our oven be!” Columbin put his finger in his mouth and replied, “I shall be glad to do it, but I understand nothing about it.”

Carrying stones was the first step in this labor. Fortunately there were some not far away. But they had no hammer. However, the two stone masons knew how to remedy this. A harder stone must be the hammer. The stones were loosened with a wedge made of wood. When the sun went down there was a great heap of stones, large and small, on the spot where they were to build the oven. It did not matter much that Columbin had bruised his little fingers; he did not mind it. Early next morning, Columbin was on the ground. He had forgotten that they were without mortar to put the stones together for the oven. He went in search of a marshy place; near a little brook Sigisbert found a vein of the best kind of clay. But they had no shovel. From a piece of wood Sigisbert fashioned a small one; that was better than nothing. He sent Columbin back to the hut to fetch a piece of deer-skin. When he returned Sigisbert had already dug up a

quantity of clay and said to him. "Columbin, I will see how much clay thou canst carry to the house in this skin. Meanwhile I shall begin the walls of the oven." Joyfully Columbin set himself to his task; great drops of sweat rolling from his face on the clay as he worked.

Sigisbert began the oven. He laid the largest stones underneath, filling the spaces between with smaller stones and clay. When the walls were two hands high, with Columbin's help Sigisbert laid a large flat stone upon them. Columbin asked, "Is the oven ready now?" The little fellow was so tired that he would have been rejoiced to hear that the work was completed. He felt his courage fail him, when he learned that it would occupy still another day. Sigisbert's small assistant slept wearily and soundly that night, and until the next morning was far advanced.

Again both laborers were busy at their work. But Columbin did not help much in

the beginning. He was full of surprises and asked many questions. Sigisbert made an arch, or vault above the flat stone, with branches, a kind of mold for what was to follow. Above it he placed another arch of stone, lining it with clay, which Columbin had to take many steps to carry to good Father Sigisbert. By evening the oven was ready; in the back was a small opening. But now Columbin became alarmed, "Father Sigisbert!" he cried. "I will bet my head that when you try to pull the boughs away the whole thing will fall to pieces!"

After a couple of days, Sigisbert thought the time had arrived to take out the wood. Not a single stone fell from the vault. "Columbin!" he said, "thou wilt not be much good without thy head. Thou wilt need it still. Winter is coming, and thou must begin to learn. Thou must be the first pupil in my little school."

Columbin looked smilingly up at his mas-

ter, his shining eyes were like two blue flowers. Sigisbert next made a fire in the oven to dry the clay. Columbin stood nearly all day by the fire, watching it. What heat came from the oven, and what a great smoke! But the happy boy said to himself, "Soon our daily bread will come out of there, when the two travelers return with corn. God grant that they are on the way, and that they may bring some!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE TWO MERCHANTS

RÄTUS and the good man traveled quickly after their departure from the hut. They heard behind them the voice of Columbin calling, "A good journey, a good journey," and the little house soon vanished from their sight. They passed through the valley towards the south; behind it was a snow-capped mountain. The man knew his way extremely well; he was familiar with every path and turn. The road was so full of stones, and so narrow that they could walk only in single file. Rätus looked over the rocky wall. Far below he heard the noise of a forest stream. Right and left, gray rocks and green woods; above, the blue sky; naught besides.

The way did not seem long to the travelers. The man knew all about it; the road was ten times older than Sigisbert. The people who lived on the other side of the mountain had made it. They were a strong and warlike race. The land of Rhœtia had been conquered by these people. The best of the inhabitants were dead, or gone away. So related the stranger at length and with great expression. Then he said, "That is what my grandfather told me; and from his grandfather he also learned it."

Conversing thus, the travelers reached the foot of the highest mountain. There they rested for a while. Now they were far, far from the hut in the forest. And distant still was the first house on the other side of the mountain.

Fresh water and a morsel of the meat they had brought with them stengthened heart and foot. Lustily fared they onward higher and ever higher; now they were at

the top, another land lay before them! The trees had leaves instead of needles, as in their own home. It was warmer here also than it had been for many weeks in the country they had left behind. And there were fields—but empty fields. And there was a village. There were large houses, much larger than the hut of Father Sigisbert and Rätus said, “After a while we can build a house like those. If only Columbin could see it!”

“We have gone far enough for to-day,” said the stranger. “We have come to a stopping-place, let us stay here.” Rätus replied that he was not tired, that he would like to continue the journey. He was filled with curiosity. “To-morrow, to-morrow we may go farther,” rejoined the man, and soon they were knocking on the door of the nearest house. The farmer opened it and invited the strangers to come in. As the man and his family had already had their repast, they brought the travelers

bread and milk. As he tasted it, Rätus said, "Milk and bread! Columbin would like that. Who knows how long it must be until he will have a bite of bread?"

Afterwards the farmer led the tired travelers to the stables, and let them sleep on the hay.

The next morning they bought three sacks of corn and a small bag of salt. Rätus cheerfully took a golden link from the chain and paid with it for what they had purchased. The stranger had other things to buy, which Sigisbert had directed him to bring back for their use. And Rätus had many things to see in the beautiful unknown country.

On the third day they prepared to return with their purchases. Both had their hands full. The man carried a saw, two axes, two hammers—and something else that made Rätus smile—a kettle. Rätus had a tree, but it was a very small one, with branches and leaves. In the other

hand he carried something sweet, two great branches full of grapes.

“Now, let us go home again,” said the man, “before the snow comes.” And what a joyous if arduous journey it was! For two golden links the farmer had engaged to send the grain by his servant across the highest point of the mountains. When he left them, they were alone in the wilderness. Soon the stars began to peep out in the darkening heavens. Rätus gathered some moss, laid it between the two sacks, and sleep soon fell upon the tired wanderers. Were they not afraid to sleep there? Had they no fear of robbers, wolves or bears? Rätus awakened once and reached for his bow, drawing it closer to his side. But all was peaceful; there was no sound but the sighing of the wind in the tops of the fir-trees.

Morning broke, but nowhere could the sun be seen rising behind the mountains. The travelers could not sleep longer; it

was too cold. The stranger reflected, wondering how they could carry their sacks of corn and their hardware home in one journey. He thought that snow would be likely to fall before night. But a gray-bearded man, a man who had traveled far and near well knows how to conquer difficulties.

"Come, Rätus! let us make a wagon," he said, and Rätus hurried eagerly to his side. A young fir-tree was speedily felled, two runners quickly fashioned with the saw, a tongue and axle followed, made from two other young trees, and behold! a convenient wagon. Some rope and a few nails that the older man had with him were of great assistance in putting it together. If it would only go, now that it was made. Rätus was sure that everything would be all right. He shouted for joy. They loaded it with the stuff they had bought. Now, now for home! It moved, yes, but very, very slowly. With hard work it rattled over the stony path. That morning Col-

umbin had prayed, "Give us to-day our daily bread." But he must still have patience. Yet another night were the pilgrims to rest under the stars of heaven instead of the roof of their beloved hut. Rätus felt homesick. In the early morning he cried out, "Will it be clear to-day?"

"Be at rest, do not worry, Rätus!" answered his companion. "We shall be at home this day before sunset."

It was afternoon, Sigisbert and Columbin sat on a little bank near the oven. They were talking of the travelers. Then Columbin heard a "Pff," and a shout. Ah! that must be Rätus. Both hastened to welcome the wanderers. That was a joyful homecoming! They had a feast in the hut. There were questions and anecdotes without end. Then began their work, which kept them busy until dark. Rätus had hidden the grapes, so that they might be a joyful surprise to Sigisbert and Rätus by the hearth-fire in the evening. First

they carried the sacks of corn into the hut. Columbin felt all over them with his slender fingers to see if there was any bread inside. Patience! The little tree had to be planted before dark. Rätus at once put a fence around it, that the goats might not eat of the branches.

Darkness had fallen, it was time for the evening meal. The four inmates of the hut sat beside the fire. The two elder men listened with amusement to the conversation of the younger. Rätus told of the beautiful land they had just visited, of their purchases of corn, of the wagon and the toilsome way. Columbin related how he and Father Sigisbert had built the oven. Sigisbert began to fall asleep. Then Rätus went out hurriedly. He came back soon, with uplifted arms, holding in either hand a branch with a bunch of grapes, as he cried. "These are for Sigisbert and Columbin." Oh, what delight for all, especially for Rätus! In a short time they went

to rest. Sigisbert prayed a long time. This evening he had much for which to thank the good God. Columbin could not sleep. It was quite late in the night when he began to sing slowly and softly, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE COMING OF WINTER

“**S**HALL we have a little bread to-day?”
was the first thing Columbin asked next morning.

“We shall have it by evening,” answered Sigisbert, consolingly. It was necessary first to make a mill. But that was easy: the materials were near the brook. The whole morning two stone-cutters were busy near the hut. They liked to work there that the blows of the hammer might not scatter the splinters and scraps all around. They were the good man and Rätus. The man was making a round hole in a great stone. Rätus hammered and hammered until he had shaped another stone so that it would fit in the round hole which the good man had made. Sigisbert

was well satisfied with his workmen. He took a handful of corn and laid it in the round basin which had been hollowed in the stone. There he laid the other stone upon it and said, "Now my Rätus. Thou art our miller, turn the stone around three times." It was not hard to do. The dry corn crackled. It went more and more easily. Sigisbert lifted up the round stone, and Columbin's eyes grew larger and larger, as he saw the beautiful white meal.

But now it was his task to separate the flour from the husk, with his delicate fingers. That required patience. Meanwhile Rätus continued his labor, and by noon they had ready a quantity of flour. In the hut a kettle full of water stood over the fire, the water already bubbling. The meal was shaken into the water, with a little salt. That made the dough. Unfortunately they had no yeast. Patience, Patience! Columbin must be contented with his bread, made for the first time as best it could be done. The

oven was hot and hissing. Sigisbert put the loaves on the shovel and laid them within it. Columbin had counted them: there were twelve. He stood in front of the oven. "God grant that the bread may be a success," said he to Sigisbert.

What a good smell! The bread was baked. The first piece was given to Columbin: at last he had his "daily bread." Every one now had a taste of the fresh bread. Then said Sigisbert, "Let us wait a while. Very fresh bread is not wholesome. It will taste better in the evening."

The autumn days were past. The flesh of the chamois that Rätus had shot, was salted for winter. The snow gathered deep in the valley. The wild goats came nearer and Rätus longed to catch a big one. Columbin still had the care of the others. He also had to cover his hay with fir-branches. He was sparing with the food; the haystack was not very large. One morning he found a kid in the little stable, a beauti-

ful little animal; white, with yellow spots. Joyfully he took it into the hut to show everybody his new treasure.

November! It seemed as though summer had come again, so lovely were the days! Rätus and the good man were able to work outside all day long. What were they building? They were making two small huts near Sigisbert's. One was for Rätus and Columbin, the other for the good man.

And then came a happy festival day. The good man had been instructed by Sigisbert. As our holy Lord had taught the apostles to say the "Our Father," so Sigisbert showed the good man how to pray. One Sunday morning Sigisbert baptized him, giving him the name of Bonus, which means "Good." He deserved this name, because he had a good heart. He wished to remain near Sigisbert, as his servant until death. Sigisbert looked around cheerfully and said, "Yes, stay with us. We have now a little village."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LITTLE HAMLET OF DESERTINA

IT grew colder and colder. The sun shone daily above the tops of the mountains for a time only, and again disappeared. The days grew shorter. It was Columbin's task to take care of the fire. He was fond of putting his hands on the warm hearth. The days were shorter, and the nights so long that to the industrious Rätus they seemed like years. Cold winds swept through the valley. One morning the hut was covered with snow. It kept on snowing all day and all night. Rätus had to sweep the snow from the wooden roofs of the three huts with a shovel. The beams cracked and Rätus put a basin underneath the split, so that Col-

umbin might have some water for his goats to drink.

Was is not very tiresome in the little village in the forest? Oh, no, they always had something to do. Only to lazy people does time seem long. Sigisbert had plenty to occupy him also; he worked and prayed, and instructed his three companions. He told them of the things of God, what Jesus had done, and what he had taught, that men might follow the counsels of the Heavenly Father. All were attentive, especially Columbin. He understood everything that Sigisbert taught more quickly than Bonus or Rätus, and also remembered longer. Besides, Columbin had to learn to read in a little book belonging to Sigisbert. This was somewhat slow. The letters in the book were very mysterious. But the good Sigisbert never lost patience. Columbin was courageous and diligent, and every day it went better and better. In a few weeks he could read words, following the letters

with his finger. Rätus would tease his little comrade now and then saying, "Thou wilt soon be as learned as Father Sigisbert, and then I will be thy servant."

But soon Columbin must learn something else, that was harder; he must learn to write. There was a great heap of fir-tree bark between the three huts. Sigisbert selected the smoothest piece, took a sharp pointed stone, and wrote on the bark the word "Columbin." Columbin knew how to read it, and by and by was able to write it. Then Sigisbert wrote, "Rätus, Bonus, Sigisbert, Desertina, Green Island." That was hard work for the little writer, Columbin!

One evening when they all sat around the fire in Sigisbert's hut, Columbin held a large piece of bark in his hand. On it was written his first letter, and this was the contents.

"Greeting to good Father Sigisbert! Thy pupil, Columbin, thanks thee with all his heart for the good thou hast done. Colum-

bin promises to be always brave and good." Sigisbert read this letter aloud. Columbin kept his promise. He studied and learned as well as he could. I doubt if there has ever been from that time until now so good a pupil as Columbin was.

It was Christmas night. For the first time it was celebrated in the Rhœtian valley. In Sigisbert's hut a bright fire burned upon the hearth. Around it sat the citizens of the little village of Desertina, still only four. But the shepherds that watched by night in the fields of Bethlehem were also few, and poor. And who could have been happier than they?

Sigisbert prayed with his loved ones and told them of Bethlehem, of the holy one of God, of the angels and the shepherds. Columbin began to sing like one of the angelic choir. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will!" They were all contented and happy. Bonus said, "You all remember that sorrowful night?

It was a blessed night for me. If it had not been for that time, I would not now be here. I would be wandering about the world. Never have I found such peace and content as in the little house of good Father Sigisbert."

Thus passed the festival of Christmas. Evening found the three neighbors, Bonus, Rätus and Columbin again in the house of Father Sigisbert. The fire burned cheerfully on the hearth. Columbin said, "O Father Sigisbert, tell us of something of the green island where thou didst live when thou were a boy, like I am now."

Then Sigisbert told them many things about his far-away home, his green island. He told them of his Father's house, his beloved parents and his dear little sister. "My good parents have been dead a long time," he said. "Oh, that I might but once weep above their graves!" The tears glistened in his eyes. And Columbin also wiped away some tears. Sigisbert rubbed his cold

hands together and said, "My green island is beautiful, the most beautiful land I have seen on earth. But now our little village of Desertina is my home." He paused. But his three neighbors answered, with one voice, "Yes, our little village, Desertina, is our home."

Sigisbert laid a dry branch on the glowing coals. The fire burned anew. It threw its red light on the venerable countenance of dear Father Sigisbert and on that of Columbin, who rested his arms upon Sigisbert's knee. Then the old man spoke once more. "Do you remember?" he asked, "what I have said to you about a tiny church with a tower and little bells?"

"When wilt thou build the church?" asked Rätus.

"I shall never see it!" said Bonus.

"Why not? We must trust in the good God," said Sigisbert cheerfully. "In another year we shall celebrate Christmas with many others in our little church. On the

hill above our village is a beautiful spot. The white walls of our chapel will be seen from afar, and the bells shall resound throughout the mountains. And our village will grow larger, and many persons will dwell with us, contented and happy."

Rätus could no longer conceal his delight. He cried aloud, "Aha! the church and our village!"

But Columbin clasped Sigisbert's hand and said softly, "Father Sigisbert, thou must not die for a long time, thou must stay a good while with us in our village."

Answered Sigisbert, "As God wills! His will be done in heaven and on earth, But now go to rest. It is late; it will soon be midnight. The fire will soon be ashes. Good night! Good night!"

The fire died away, and it was still in the three huts. In the heavens the stars were shining, gazing down upon the happy little village in the Rhoetian valley.

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